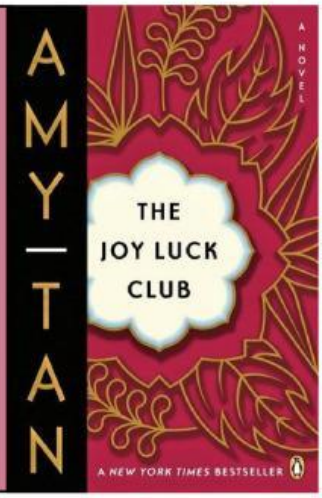
Translingual Chinese-American Literature Reading Practice - The Joy Luck Club

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is strongly inspired by her relationship with her mother, Daisy Tan, who grew up in China during a period marked by war, poverty, displacement, and social upheaval. Like the women in the novel, Amy Tan's mother emigrated to the United States carrying stories of loss, survival, and the determination to find joy despite hardship. The Joy Luck Club itself is based on gatherings of Chinese women who used food, storytelling, and games to preserve hope and dignity during times when daily life was dominated by fear and uncertainty.



Task 1: Answer the following questions in short notes.

1. What do you think people usually do to *cope* with fear and hardship? Why do you think storytelling, food, and social gatherings might be especially important?

2. What kinds of values or attitudes do you expect Amy Tan's mother to represent?

3. From the title *The Joy Luck Club*, what do you think "joy" and "luck" might symbolise beyond their literal meaning?

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Task 2: Match the words/expressions (1–9) with their definitions (A–I).
Try to rely on logic and context rather than a dictionary.

Expressions	Definitions
1. to slit someone's throat 2. money ingots 3. meager allowances 4. to eat sparingly 5. fragrant 6. stringy squash 7. ivory tiles 8. to be possessed by something 9. somber faces	A. Food with long, tough fibres that are hard to chew B. Small amounts of money, barely enough to live on C. Pale, smooth game pieces made from animal material D. To kill someone by cutting their neck E. Having a strong, pleasant smell F. To eat only small amounts, often deliberately G. Gold- or silver-shaped objects symbolising wealth H. Controlled or driven by a powerful emotion or belief I. Serious, sad, and without visible emotion

Task 3: Read the passage and complete the tasks below.

"I thought up Joy Luck on a summer night that was so hot even the moths fainted to the ground, their wings were so heavy with the damp heat. Every place was so crowded there was no room for fresh air. Unbearable smells from the sewers rose up to my second-story window and the stink had nowhere else to go but into my nose. At all hours of the night and day, I heard screaming sounds. I didn't know if it was a peasant slitting the throat of a runaway pig or an officer beating a half-dead peasant for lying in his way on the sidewalk. I didn't go to the window to find out. What use would it have been? And that's when I thought I needed something to do to help me move.

"My idea was to have a gathering of four women, one for each corner of my mah jong table. I knew which women I wanted to ask. They were all young like me, with wishful faces. One was an army officer's wife, like myself. Another was a girl with very fine manners from a rich family in Shanghai. She had escaped with only a little money. And there was a girl from Nanking who had the blackest hair I have ever seen. She came from a low-class family, but she was pretty and pleasant and had married well, to an old man who died and left her with a better life.

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"Each week one of us would host a party to raise money and to raise our spirits. The hostess had to serve special dyansyin foods to bring good fortune of all kinds—dumplings shaped like silver money ingots, long rice noodles for long life, boiled peanuts for conceiving sons, and of course, many good-luck oranges for a plentiful, sweet life.

"What fine food we treated ourselves to with our meager allowances! We didn't notice that the dumplings were stuffed mostly with stringy squash and that the oranges were spotted with wormy holes. We ate sparingly, not as if we didn't have enough, but to protest how we could not eat another bite, we had already bloated ourselves from earlier in the day. We knew we had luxuries few people could afford. We were the lucky ones.

"After filling our stomachs, we would then fill a bowl with money and put it where everyone could see. Then we would sit down at the mah jong table. My table was from my family and was of a very fragrant red wood, not what you call rosewood, but hong mu, which is so fine there's no English word for it. The table had a very thick pad, so that when the mah jong pai were spilled onto the table the only sound was of ivory tiles washing against one another.

"Once we started to play, nobody could speak, except to say 'Pung!' or 'Chr!' when taking a tile. We had to play with seriousness and think of nothing else but adding to our happiness through winning. But after sixteen rounds, we would again feast, this time to celebrate our good fortune. And then we would talk into the night until the morning, saying stories about good times in the past and good times yet to come.

"Oh, what good stories! Stories spilling out all over the place! We almost laughed to death. A rooster that ran into the house screeching on top of dinner bowls, the same bowls that held him quietly in pieces the next day! And one about a girl who wrote love letters for two friends who loved the same man. And a silly foreign lady who fainted on a toilet when firecrackers went off next to her.

"People thought we were wrong to serve banquets every week while many people in the city were starving, eating rats and, later, the garbage that the poorest rats used to feed on. Others thought we were possessed by demons—to celebrate when even within our own families we had lost generations, had lost homes and fortunes, and were separated, husband from wife, brother from sister, daughter from mother. Hnnnh! How could we laugh, people asked.

"It's not that we had no heart or eyes for pain. We were all afraid. We all had our miseries. But to despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what

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was already unbearable. How much can you wish for a favorite warm coat that hangs in the closet of a house that burned down with your mother and father inside of it? How long can you see in your mind arms and legs hanging from telephone wires and starving dogs running down the streets with half-chewed hands dangling from their jaws? What was worse, we asked among ourselves, to sit and wait for our own deaths with proper somber faces? Or to choose our own happiness?

"So we decided to hold parties and pretend each week had become the new year. Each week we could forget past wrongs done to us. We weren't allowed to think a bad thought. We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week, we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy. And that's how we came to call our little parties Joy Luck."

Task 4: Choose **one** task:

Option 1: Write **one sentence** explaining the *life philosophy* of Amy Tan's mother as presented in the text.

Option 2: In 1–2 sentences, explain what the Joy Luck Club *symbolised* for Amy Tan's mother and her friends.

Task 5: Read the extract again more carefully and answer the questions in full sentences.

1. How is life outside the Joy Luck Club described? Identify at least **two images** that create this atmosphere.

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2. Why did other people mostly **condemn** these weekly banquets?

3. Why is the description of food important, even though the food is actually poor in quality?

4. What contrast does the author create between **fear/despair** and **chosen happiness**?

5. Why do you think silence is required during the mahjong game?

6. How do storytelling and laughter function as more than simple entertainment?

Task 6: Match the terms with their explanations. You may briefly research if needed.

Term	Meaning
1. Mahjong	A. Individual tiles used in the game

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2. Mahjong *pai*	B. A traditional Chinese tile-based game
3. Pung	C. A call made when claiming a set of identical tiles
4. Hong mu	D. A rare, high-quality Chinese hardwood
5. Dyansyin foods	E. Foods believed to bring luck and positive outcomes

The text also mentions several symbolic foods. Find and state each of these foods' symbolic meaning **according to the passage**. Answer the questions:

- Why do you think *this particular food* came to symbolise that meaning?
- What qualities of the food (shape, colour, length, rarity, taste, etc.) might explain the symbolism?

Long rice noodles	
Dumplings	
Oranges	
Boiled peanuts	

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Task 7: Answer the following question:

What does this passage reveal about Chinese cultural values such as hope, resilience, community, and choice?
How does Amy Tan's portrayal challenge the idea that joy must only exist when life is easy?

Support your ideas with:

- At least **one example** from the text
- At least **one cultural or symbolic element** (food, storytelling, games, silence, repetition of rituals)

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